



# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*Celebrating 26 Years of Advocacy & Achievement*

## COMMISSIONERS

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Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW  
Martha Trevino Powell  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

## APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **August 2, 2010**, in Room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim accounting or transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry	Sandra Rudnick
Ann Franzen	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Helen A. Kleinberg	Martha Trevino Powell
Rev. Cecil L. Murray	Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Steven M. Olivas, Esq.	

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi	Dr. Maria A. Prieto
Susan F. Friedman	Stacey Savelle
Dr. La-Doris McClanney	

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Curry at 10:07 a.m.

## **II. INTRODUCTIONS**

Self introductions were made.

## **III. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

- **August 02, 2010**

### Action Taken:

On motion of Commissioner Kleinberg, seconded by Commissioner Olivas (Commissioners Biondi, Friedman, McClanney, Prieto and Savelle being absent), the agenda for August 2, 2010, was unanimously approved.

## **IV. CHAIR'S REPORT**

Chair Curry reported the following:

- At the July 19, 2010, Commission meeting, Commissioner Friedman provided a verbal report on proposed recommendations to the Board of Supervisors (Board) by the Protocol for Probation Youth Fatalities Ad-hoc workgroup. These recommendations will be reviewed by the Board Children's Deputies prior to the Commission's vote to send them to the Board.
- On August 3, 2010, the Board will consider a motion by Supervisors Antonovich and Knabe ([Item 3 of 08/03/10](#)) regarding the strengthening of the Los Angeles County's Child Protection Safety Net through an independent auditing firm.

DCFS Director Trish Ploehn welcomes an independent auditor as it will provide DCFS with an outside perspective.

- A recommendation by Supervisor Knabe to appoint Dr. Sunny Kang to the Commission is on the Board's agenda for August 3, 2010.

**Action Taken:**

After discussion, Chair Curry's verbal report was received and filed. Further, on motion of Commissioner Kleinberg, seconded by Commissioner Murray (Commissioners Biondi, Friedman, McClaney, Prieto and Savelle being absent), the Commission approved to send a memo ([copy on file](#)) to the Board recommending that Supervisor Antonovich and Knabe's motion be revised to include an instruction to the independent auditor to review the role that the private and non-profit sectors play in working with the County to strengthen the County's overall child protection safety net.

**V. MOTION TO APPROVE A LETTER TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS SEEKING SUPPORT OF SB 1255**

**Adelina Sorkin**

Commissioner Sorkin presented a letter to be sent on behalf of the Commission to the Board seeking support of California Senate Bill 1255 (Padilla) ([copy on file](#)).

Commissioner Williams offered a suggestion to revise the following sentence from the letter to read as follows: "In December 2008, the Commission recommended to your Board ~~to develop~~ **the development of** a policy that addresses childhood obesity; this policy was adopted by the County in 2009."

**Action Taken:**

After discussion, at the suggestion of Commissioner Williams, and on motion of Commissioner Curry, seconded by Commissioner Kleinberg (Commissioners Biondi, Friedman, McClaney, Prieto and Savelle being absent), the letter to the Board seeking support of SB 1255 was unanimously approved as revised ([copy on file](#)).

## **VI. PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS**

### **b. DCFS Child Safety Enhancements**

### **DCFS Executive Team**

The Commission welcomed DCFS Director Trish Ploehn and the Executive Team. Joining Director Ploehn were Deputy Directors, Joi Russell, Eric Marts, Maryam Fatemi and. Norma Doctor Sparks.

Chair Curry informed Commissioners that Director Ploehn contacted her on Sunday evening, August 1, 2010, to let her know that County Counsel had advised her that the fatality statistics could be presented orally but not in writing. Chair Curry advised Commissioners to make notes on fatality information since there would be no handouts.

Director Ploehn reported the following:

- In 2007, DCFS ordered 2,400 laptop computers to allow increased mobility for Children Social Workers (CSWs). Additionally, 400 broadband cards and 500 Citrix licenses were also ordered to provide CSWs internet access regardless of their location, and to allow them to connect remotely to their desktop PC's thereby allowing access to vital DCFS databases including the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). However, it was later discovered that the network infrastructure would not be able to support remote multiple-user access.

DCFS sought technical expertise from the Chief Information Office (CIO) and the Internal Services Department (ISD). The CIO and ISD recommended that since DCFS' current network infrastructure was unable to support remote multiple-user access, laptops be given to CSWs for use at their workstations – laptops were distributed in January 2008.

DCFS and ISD worked in conjunction with the State of California and the Federal government to transition a large portion of automation oversight to ISD. Consequently, in June 2008, DCFS submitted an Advanced Planning Document (APD) to the State, requesting permission to move forward with the transition, and received State approval in February 2009. Unfortunately due to limited funding resources, the State was unable to provide the level of support DCFS needed.

DCFS and ISD opted to review other possible technical solutions to allow CSW access to these vital systems. A possible solution was the use of broadband cards. However, when the DCFS Pomona office tested the use of broadband cards, they discovered the internet connection was slow and unreliable.

In January 2010, the Federal government approved the transition that would allow ISD automation oversight, and in May 2010, the bids for the network infrastructure were completed. ISD completed the new network infrastructure in late July 2010, and recommended the use of Remote Services Access (RSA) devices, which allow users to securely and remotely access their desktops from any computer in the world. The DCFS Hawthorne and Compton offices were the first two offices with the new network; all DCFS staff will have RSA's by October 2010.

- DCFS serves a little over 32,000 children. About 15,000 or 47 percent are served in out-of-home care, including foster care, group home, foster family agencies, or relative care. Of those 15,000 in out-of-home care, approximately 7,000 or 47% are staying with relatives, and the remaining 17,000 are served within their home. DCFS' focus has been, and always will be, to place children with their families whenever that can be done safely.
- The DCFS child protection hotline receives approximately 150,000 - 170,000 calls per year, averaging 13,000 calls per month. Approximately 60,000 calls received annually become referrals which equates to about 5,550 referrals per month. Annually, 11,000 children are removed from their families which equates to 925 removals per month. Approximately 17 percent of all children served are removed from home.
- The first six months of 2010 and 2009 were compared, and the analysis revealed that there has been a ten percent increase in hotline calls, which equates to a nine percent increase in referrals. The increase in hotline calls and referrals is equivalent to the amount of cases that 66 CSWs would handle.
- The key to success is to have more children leaving rather than entering the system. Successful efforts to Permanency happen through reunification, adoption or guardianship. On a monthly average about 620 children are reunified, 180 adopted, and approximately 70 exit through legal guardianship.
- DCFS has been very successful in reducing the timelines to permanency, reducing reliance on out-of-home care and serving more children at home. To ensure that every possible solution to child safety is considered, in December 2009, the formation of the Emergency Response Redesign Steering Committee (Steering Committee) headed by DCFS Deputy Director Mr. Eric Marts, began a comprehensive review of all front-end services.

Mr. Marts reported that the Steering Committee consists of representatives from every office that handles front-end services within DCFS. He added the following:

- The Committee has reviewed the following issues:
  - Front-end comprehensive investigations and assessments.
  - Disproportionality among African American and Native American children.
  - Improving pertinent collateral contacts.
  - Co-locations with law enforcement agencies, which have proven to be very positive.
  - Trainings which are vital due the growing number of new DCFS employees.
  - Policy, protocol, and lessons learned from critical incidents and concurrent training with law enforcement.
  - Re-training of all CSWs in Structured Decision Making.
  - Allowing the Command Post to begin intake of referrals a half hour earlier than usual which has provided significant relief to line operations.
- The Quality Review Team was formed as a sub-committee of the Steering Committee to develop a tool and assess how well social workers were conducting their investigations and to determine a baseline that will be used to gauge future improvements.
- In collaboration with Casey Family Programs, a new model was introduced to DCFS; this core practice model provides social workers the ability to identify signs of child safety so that social workers can distinguish a safe child from an unsafe child. DCFS hopes all social workers can be trained on this new core practice model by the end of 2010.

Ms. Parrish reported the following:

- January 2009 - DCFS successfully submitted a proposal requesting the reestablishment of the quality assurance and improvement staff to carefully review all of the work done internally. Their first assignment was to conduct a study of 630 ER referrals which was completed in the summer 2009. The study was significant and provided a baseline study of a sample that included a variety of cases, not just critical incidents.
- Fall 2009 - 600 of the Emergency Response CSWs participated in a child safety refresher training course which focused on the 52 polices related to the front-end practice of investigating ER referrals. A similar training specifically designed for supervisors and managers was also conducted.
- July 2010 - DCFS piloted a new coaching and mentoring training that focused on the front-end and ER. DCFS plans to develop additional trainings based on the pilot model.

- The ER study revealed that the ER investigators had a very short period of time to complete a large amount of work. As a result, investigators were rushing to complete the referrals which in turn produced the following areas of critical need or improvement:
  - Ensure that the reporting party was contacted; document contact.
  - Ensure that the children were interviewed alone; document interview.
  - Ensure sufficient amount of collateral contacts.
- DCFS will periodically conduct similar test samples within the Regional Offices. Data from the Regional Offices was compared to that of the original study, and it was determined that by March 2010, the following improvements were made:
  - Interviewing children alone documentation increased from 66 percent to 75 percent.
  - Mandated reporters documentation increased from 71 percent to 78 percent
  - Collateral contacts increased from an average 1.7 to over an average of three per case.
- The ER Safety study produced a series of recommendations, including the Comprehensive Investigation Narrative to produce higher quality investigations.
- DCFS' procurement is working with a consultant in the development of an Articulated Practice Model or "field guides" for staff, beginning roll out with ER staff. The "field guides" will focus on best practices and policy standards.

Ms. Russell reported the following:

- She and the three service Deputies; Ms. Fatemi, Ms. Sparks, and Mr. Marts are housed at the Regional Offices, which leads to positive changes and enhancements, as each Service Deputy can directly oversee the office's operations, and CSWs can easily voice their concerns and needs.
- Currently, the average CSW case load is 27; DCFS' goal is to reduce the average to 18. ER staff needs additional time to fully investigate each referral.
- In March 2010, DCFS deployed 43 CSWs to ER, 37 social workers and six SCSW's, and most recently DCFS completed its second deployment consisting of 63 social worker and 14 SCSW's to ER.

- An Investigation Narrative drafted by Mr. Mart's team will be programmed into CWS/CMS decreasing the amount of data entry required by CSW to address concerns on the length of time it takes to type narratives. The Dragon Natural Speaking Speech Recognition software was purchased to alleviate the cumbersome task of typing for CSWs. Upon State approval, all DCFS offices will have the software.
- Family and Children Index (FCI) has had significant improvements within the last nine months. Currently, when a referral is submitted, clerical staff prints and attaches the FCI printout for that client. In the future, referrals will be sent electronically to the CSW with the FCI report attached.
- A recent system enhancement automatically alerts staff when a hotline referral on an existing open case is submitted. In addition, if a hotline referral has three existing referrals, a red alert is sent to supervisors, managers and Deputy Directors.

In response to questions posed by the Commission, DCFS Director Ploehn and the DCFS Executive Team added the following:

- CSWs input a significant amount of data into CWS/CMS as required by policy, because they are most familiar with the data; however, eligibility and clerical staff also assist with data input.
- According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DCFS and SEIU Local Union 721, front-end ER CSWs caseload is 27. The department's goal is 18. In early 2010, DCFS was reaching this goal; however, due to the recent influx of hotline referrals, as well as the child safety enhancement recently implemented, the number of caseloads has risen to 24-26. DCFS has addressed the increase by temporarily deploying and transferring a total of 311 staff to ER.
- The economic downturn has resulted in reductions, cuts and elimination of programs and services. For example, staff in the Permanency Partners Program (P3) was transferred to address the increase in ER.
- DCFS hired 130 Masters in Social Work (MSWs). It is anticipated that by December 2010, these new arrivals will allow DCFS to release the temporarily deployed staff to their original programs.
- DCFS will be the first in California to use the 60 day assessment. Allowing staff more time to collect collateral contacts and conduct an in-depth investigation will significantly benefit the children and the families served. DCFS is not taking 60 days to determine whether or not a child is safe at home. Child safety is determined at the front-end, the 60 days provides investigators time to determine potential future risk.

- The national average for attrition rates of the social worker is about 18 percent; due to the current economy DCFS is at 1.2.
- The RSA is very secure and password protected. The access code needed to remotely access a desktop from any computer recycles every few minutes.

In response to questions posed by Commissioner Sorkin regarding the status of State legislation requiring the Department of Mental Health to share information with the Probation Department and Department of Children and Family Services, Chair Curry suggested that the Commission be updated at a future meeting. In response to Chair Curry's questions regarding child fatality statistics, County Counsel advised the Director of DCFS not to respond to the questions at this time. Chair Curry questioned County Counsel as to whether the information was public information. County Counsel indicated that it was but still advised the Director of DCFS not to respond.

Barbara Moore addressed the Commission.

**Action Taken:**

After discussion, verbal reports by the DCFS Executive Team were received and filed.

**VII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was none.

**VIII ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There was none.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Curry at 12:07 p.m.